

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

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LESSON EIGHTEEN

PSALMS (IN GENERAL)

The book of Psalms has sometimes been classified according to authors.

As, for example, the titles indicate that:

- seventy-three were written by David,
- fifty are anonymous,
- twelve have the name of Asaph, and
- ten that of Korah, or the sons of Korah, attached to them,
- two are associated with the name of Solomon,
- one Moses,
- one Heman,
- one Ethan.

A comparison of Acts 4:25 and Hebrews 4:7 shows that Psalms 2 and 95 respectively, were also written by David, though not ascribed to him by title in the book, and the question naturally arises whether he may not have been the author as well of a still larger number of the anonymous Psalms. As some of those with the name of the sons of Korah were evidently written for them, may he have been their author as well?

The same query arises about the Psalm 72, which is one of the two to which Solomon's name is attached. I might add here that the titles of the Psalms are regarded by many expositors as of

equal authority with the text itself, and hence if we can ascertain what the title really is we may venture to build conclusions upon it.

The Subjects of the Psalms

The book of Psalms again, has been classified sometimes according to the subject of the Psalms. Angus, in his *Bible Handbook*, has a convenient classification of this character which I copy in part, giving the subject, and in each case the number of a few Psalms illustrating it.

For example there are Psalms of:

- instruction, like 1, 19,39;
- trust, 3, 27, 31, 46, 56,62, 86;
- praise, 8, 29, 93, 100;
- distress and sorrow, 4, 13, 55, 64, 88;
- thanksgiving, 30, 65, 103, 107, 116;
- aspiration, 42, 63, 80, 84, 137;
- penitence, 6, 32, 38, 51, 143;
- history, 78, 105, 106;
- prophecy (Messianic) 2, 16, 22, 24, 40, 45, 68, 69, 72, 97, 110, 118.

The Books of the Psalms

It may seem strange to some to speak of the "Books" of the Psalms, but that expresses another kind of classification sometimes made.

The whole book has been divided into five books, each ending with a similar doxology, as follows:

- Book I, Psalms 1-41.
- Book II, Psalms 42-72.
- Book III, Psalms 73-89.
- Book IV, Psalms 90-106.
- Book V, Psalms 107-150.

Notice the close of each of these books for the doxology spoken of.

There are those who question the truth or value of this division, however, on the ground, first, that the title of the book itself in the Hebrew (*Sepher Tehillim*), is singular rather than plural. It is not the "books" but the book of Psalms.

Secondly the numbers of the Psalms continue unbroken from the beginning to the end of the book.

Thirdly, there are other doxologies than those especially referred to, e. g., Psalms 117 and 134.

The view of these others, therefore, is that the Psalms comprise but one book with an order

and unity throughout, the key to which is found in its final application to the millennial age and establishment of the kingdom of GOD on the earth.

According to these expositors, and I am strongly of their feeling in the matter, this explains what are known as the imprecatory or cursing Psalms. These Psalms have greatly puzzled many, but when we come to consider them as terminating on that period when the era of mercy for the Gentile nations closes, and the time of their judgment begins, it lightens their problems very much.

In the same connection we want to remember that the author is speaking in the prophetic spirit, and that the enemies are conceived of as enemies of GOD Himself, whose permanent rejection of Him is implied. This view of the Psalms in their ultimate and millennial application, moreover, explains those like the ninety-first, which promise exemption from such things as pestilence and war. This ninety-first Psalm was written doubtless on the occasion of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, but its language seems to indicate that it is a type of their greater and permanent deliverance in the time to come. This view of the ninety-first Psalm is strengthened if we conceive of the preceding Psalm as giving a picture of Israel to-day, as many do conceive of it. I may add further, that the opinion which sees the key to the interpretation of the Psalms in their ultimate millennial application furnishes further, an explanation of the frequent New Testament references to CHRIST which are found in the Psalms where we would least expect them. It will come in the way of our later studies to point these out.

Analysis of Particular Psalms

What we now propose is to analyze a few particular Psalms as samples of their class. We shall begin with the Davidic Psalms, by which we mean specifically, those in which the human author is very evidently speaking of himself and his experiences. Our object in this particular case is simply to assist in the understanding of such Psalms for our own personal comfort and the use we may make of them in teaching others in the way of Bible readings, etc.

Psalm 3 is the first of this kind that comes before us. What does the title say as to the occasion in David's life when it was written? Examine the marginal reference for the chapters in II Samuel where the story of Absalom's rebellion is told. It has always seemed to me that the Psalm belongs at about the place indicated at 15:10. Keeping these two passages of Scripture before you, II Samuel 15:10-30, and Psalm 3, ask yourself such questions as these, finding the answers in the Psalm:

- to whom does David appeal from his conspirators (II Samuel 15:12, 13, with the first verse of the Psalm)?
- what insinuation did they raise against David (Psalm 3:2)?
- what great sin had David committed previously giving the thoughtless some reason to feel that Absalom's rebellion was thus a judgment of GOD upon him?
- what does Psalm 51 testify as to David's repentance for this sin?
- what does Psalm 32 testify as to his forgiveness?
- on the ground, therefore, of that known forgiveness, how does David express his faith and confidence in GOD in the present crisis (Psalm 3:3)?
- in what was his strong assurance based (v. 4)?

- do you suppose he was here referring to his experiences in Psalms 51 and 32?

The story in II Samuel shows us David and his few faithful followers traveling over the Mount of Olives pursued by Absalom and the other conspirators.

- how does his faith in GOD affect his nervous and physical condition (Psalm 3:4)?
- does he attribute his rest to natural or supernatural causes (same verse, last clause)?
- how did he feel in the morning, with what courage did he awake (v. 6)?
- how does he express his confidence as to the outcome of the present rebellion (v. 7)?
- with what general declaration and counsel to us does he conclude his Psalm?

We thus see how easy it is to draw intelligent comfort and aid from the Psalms of David when we understand their historical connection.

We see also how necessary it is to understand the Psalms in the light of their history in order to understand David himself.

In I and II Samuel we have the outside of the man. but in the Psalms we have the inside, and it is necessary to put the two together to appreciate how he could have been "**a man after God's own heart.**"

~ end of Lesson 18 ~
